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ABSTRACT

A follow-up study examined the life and educational histories of selected adult basic education (ABE) students and the perceived impact of such experiences on their personal growth. Interviewed survey participants were asked about the effect of ABE on the following areas of their lives: self-image, attitudes towards life, self-direction, ability to relate to people, working with others, problem solving, attitude towards learning, competing for jobs, consumer skills, meeting one's own goals, and learner success. While most of those interviewed expressed a need to enhance their self-concept, their attitude towards life was surprisingly optimistic. Many interviewees evidenced a dependency on and difficulty in relating to others and difficulty in solving problems. Although most study participants were uncertain about their ability to compete successfully for jobs, they felt that ABE considerably sharpened their consumer skills and helped them reach their personal goals. In general, they wanted more educational programs, increased support services, and more teachers who could assess learner needs and interests and make learning easier yet more challenging. (MN)

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# INDIVIDUAL DEVELOPMENT AND ADULT BASIC EDUCATION:

# A STUDENT FOLLOW-UP

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## INTRODUCTION

It has frequently been proclaimed that the ultimate goal of education is the development of the individual; consequently, it is essential to determine exactly what factors within the educational system promote or hinder student growth. The purpose of this study was to examine personal growth factors in Adult Basic Education students and then to determine the relationship of these traits to specific teacher characteristics or educational experiences.

To assess the effectiveness of any educational program is a difficult task, for there are a number of factors that affect the learning process per se, the impact of which may be felt only over rather extended periods of time. The determination of the effect of specific program or teacher characteristics on personal growth and development is much more difficult. Past attempts at such evaluation were frequently limited by the narrowness, restrictiveness and deductive nature of traditional designs.

In this study qualitative rather than quantitative approaches were used to examine the life and educational histories of selected Adult Basic Education students and the perceived impact of such experiences on their personal growth. To meet this goal, the following activities were conducted: (a) A student follow-up plan had to be designed that would measure factors essential to successful development and then relate them to specific characteristics of the instructional program. It was determined that a two-step process was needed to accomplish this objective. First, the factors indicative of student success had to be selected. Program characteristics and teacher traits likely to relate to these success factors had to be determined as well. Second, a process for obtaining the student follow-up data had to be designed. (b) A sufficient number of student follow-ups had to be conducted in order to be able to relate characteristics of their success to characteristics of the instructional program.

(c) The data needed to be analyzed and the findings disseminated to appropriate educational personnel.

This report has three main sections: (1) methodology used to select learner success traits, teacher traits and program characteristics and to design the interview process; (2) the findings based on the analysis of the students' self-evaluation, their positive and negative growth experiences, especially with regard to educational settings, and important teacher traits; and (3) conclusions and recommendations.

## DESIGN OF THE STUDY

### Learner Success Traits

An initial step in measuring student growth was the development of a set of criteria that would adequately define such growth. Since the purpose of educational programs is in the final analysis defined by the people active in operationalizing such programs, it was decided that leadership both at the local and at the state level would be utilized in selecting such "learner success" criteria. A brainstorming session was conducted at a meeting of Texas adult education leaders that included Texas Education Agency consultants and university staff development specialists, as well as local directors. Their suggestions were consolidated into a list of more than twenty criteria by which learner success in an adult basic education program might be judged. These suggestions were then sent to local leaders throughout the state seeking their input on the most appropriate criteria by which to assess learner success in adult basic education programs. Nearly all of the 65 individuals polled responded--some indicating they had involved many of their staff in the process.

The following list indicates the learner success traits that received the greatest support from people in the field and that were consequently used in this study:

1. Increase in self-esteem
2. Increase in self-direction
3. Ability to make better decisions and to solve problems
4. More favorable attitude toward learning
5. Ability to relate to people
6. Sense of accomplishment in meeting one's own goals
7. Ability to compete successfully for jobs

8. More constructive attitude towards life
9. Ability to work successfully with others
10. Better consumer skills

## THE INTERVIEWS

### Teacher and Program Characteristics

In an effort to determine which teacher characteristics should be used in this study, a number of research activities were reviewed. What was sought was a list of teacher traits that (1) had evidenced some relationship to conditions in the field, (2) related to the education of adults in general rather than some specific grade level, and (3) was compact enough to be manageable in this study. The decision was made that the list of teacher competencies developed by this project during prior years was the one that came closest to filling these conditions. These teacher competencies were based on input from the field through task analyses, delphi studies, and surveys. They related well to lifelong learning rather than specific levels of schooling. Also, the list could be reduced from fourteen to ten competency areas, simply by consolidating the four areas dealing with content into one general competency. These competencies had to be reworded so that the students could relate to them. Listed below are the original competency area statements and the wording given to them in this study.

| Original Competency Statement | Rewording Used in This Study |
|---|---|
| 1. To build effective interpersonal relationships with the adult learner. | Talked with me like a friend; wanted me to do well. |
| 2. To demonstrate an understanding of the adult learner and adult learning. | Knew how to make learning easier; challenged me to learn. |
| 3. To integrate community resources into the adult education program. | Showed me a lot of helpful people and places in town. |
| 4. To assess the adult learners. | Took time to find out what I wanted and needed. |

| | |
|---|---|
| 5. To plan learning activities. | Planned lessons well. |
| 6. To manage learning activities. | Kept us busy learning a lot. |
| 7. To evaluate learning activities. | Always knew how well we were doing and told us. |
| 8. To undertake activities for continual professional development. | Was a real pro -- the kind of person I would like to imitate. |
| 9. To perform appropriate non-instructional tasks. | Kept the classroom comfortable and full of good materials. |
| 10. To identify the major concepts, characteristics, and procedures appropriate for teaching general life skills and for specific program areas (that is, Adult Basic Education, General Educational Development, and English as a Second Language). | Clearly presented much information. |

No effort was made to determine whether the participants in the study related these reworded statements to the original concepts. However, throughout the interviewing process, no noticeable bias toward these statements was shown, except possibly for the one dealing with classroom management. A number of the adult learners were enthralled by the flexibility of the learning center or classroom and the fact that they could do things at their own pace. They may have been turned off by the statement: The teacher kept us busy learning a lot.

Program characteristics were not dealt with in this same deliberate manner. A few were incorporated into the biographical data collected at the beginning of each interview. (See appendix A for the interview schedule.) All interviewees, for example, were asked what kind of adult programs they had entered, their reasons for entering and leaving, time spent in an ABE program, and benefits

gotten from the program. Other comments of the program were solicited in an open-ended fashion, especially in the last section of the interview.

The Interview Schedule and Its Use

An open-ended personal interview was selected as the most appropriate method for gathering data for this study. This decision was made because of the demonstrated success of the interview process in other studies involving adult learners especially when such studies were designed to investigate new areas and discover nebulous relationships. Moreover, it was considered the only approach flexible enough to handle the intricacies of life histories and personal growth traits as well as the varying language abilities of the proposed participants. The use of telephone interviews was considered but was rejected because project staff felt that the face-to-face encounter within the adult's learning environment would add much to the interpretation of the interviewees' comments.

One of the most serious questions that had to be faced in the design of the interview instrument was the degree to which adults could be expected to link past growth experiences with present characteristics. Discussions with other adult education researchers led to the insight that, if adults could be led to think of specific activities they engaged in, they would be much more likely to recall in detail past experiences that led to the present behavior. Thus each section of the interview investigated a separate learner success trait and was introduced with questions designed to get the adult learner talking about typical personal behavior in that area. The interviewer was then to pick up on some specific example of behavior and begin to probe as to what past experiences were perceived as causing that characteristic or reaction. It was only later, as a third step, that the interview moved to education and its effect on that aspect of a person's behavior. Each section of the interview was concluded by having the interviewee refer to a separate

card listing the ten teacher characteristics and selecting the items considered most influential in the development of his or her ability in that area. The interviewer then checked the level of performance of the learner success trait under consideration that he/she judged the interviewee to possess and then turned to a new area.

The final activity of each interview was the filling out of a thirty item "Learner Traits Checklist." This instrument was developed by the project staff and simply proposed three statements for each of the ten learner success traits and asked the interviewee to indicate whether this behavior was "usually not," "sometimes," or "almost always" true of him/herself. Since it was recognized that the social desirability of certain answers could sway responses, at least one of each set of three statements was phrased in a manner thought to be less attractive. Despite the lack of guarantees regarding the validity and reliability of this instrument, it was judged important to have this additional assessment by the adult learner regarding his/her perceived ranking on each success trait.

The time needed to complete such an in-depth interview was also a concern. It was evident that the interviews might easily run longer than the one hour maximum estimated that the adult learners could give. However, it was decided to retain all ten learner success traits as part of the interview but allow the interviewee to omit sections as the interview progressed. Actual practice indicated that completion of all the sections of the interview took one and a half to two hours; most students, however, were able to give only about one hour to the interviewer.

Although six different individuals acted as interviewers, seventy-five percent were conducted by two people. Most of the interviews were conducted in the adult learning centers.

Sample

Data were collected from sixty-five adult learners, the majority of whom were or had been participants in Adult Basic Education programs. Thirty-eight were currently enrolled in programs, 10 had completed and one had dropped out. Of the sixteen others interviewed, nine would not have qualified for ABE classes because of educational levels. The interviews were conducted at seven representative sites in the state. Selection could not be randomized since participation depended on the individuals' willingness to give one hour of their time for the interview.

There were 23 men and 42 women who varied in age from 18 to 95; 7 were 21 years of age or under; 17 ranged from 22 to 30 years; and 18, from 31 to 40 years of age. More than half of the interviewees had been born in the state of Texas, representing various ethnic groups; seventeen were from other countries including Mexico, Thailand, Vietnam, Ecuador and Guatemala. More than half of them came from an urban or suburban setting.

With regard to their economic level, 45 percent grew up in families with a low income and 44 percent, a middle-level income. Almost 25 percent were unemployed or worked part-time; there were quite a few semi-skilled workers but only five professionals. There was a wide range of variation in years of schooling, ranging from none at all (two people) to six years of higher education (one person). Overall, there were 12 with less than an eighth grade level of education, 11 who had finished the eighth grade, 20 who had had three years of high school, 9 who had graduated from high school, and 13 who had had from 1 to 6 years of college.

When asked about the Adult Education Programs they had entered and their reasons for doing so, almost half said they had enrolled in the GED program because they wanted to get a diploma, primarily to get a job, but also to gain entry to vocational training or higher education. There were also a number

who took ESL to improve their language skills; others simply wanted to improve themselves. As to the benefits from the program, only three of the respondents indicated they had not gotten everything they wanted from the classes. Those who had been able to improve their English skills were happy about being able to converse in English; several mentioned that improving their math skills had made them feel better about themselves. About a dozen individuals pointed to additional things they wanted but felt they were not getting: more help with math; more interaction with other students; need to "get a handle" on where they were going. When asked about their reading habits (newspaper), approximately one fourth of them responded very negatively. Only a few read the whole paper; some read just the ads while about half read the national news. With regard to other reading such as magazines and books, about one third indicated they read news magazines or other material that could be classified as intellectually stimulating, while another third read very little or nothing. The rest of the interviewees did some reading for pleasure.

The interviewees were also questioned about what they thought had been the most important or significant event in their lives. Since this was an open-ended question, there was a great deal of variety in expression, but there was a pattern of response with regard to five types of events--four negative and one positive. Among the negative events in the lives of these people, these stand out: a death of a parent or someone close in the family; an unhappy marriage that led to separation of parents or spouse; a tragic event such as an accident, an injury, or an illness that had left a person incapacitated for a long time; and a move to another area or country. The only positive event cited by several was related to having a happy marriage.

# FINDINGS

## Self-Image

It was quite evident that many adults who enroll in ABE programs have negative feelings about their past educational experiences. Unless their self-image develops, especially regarding their ability to benefit from their adult education experiences, they will more than likely give up and drop out at the first sign of threat or possible failure. Among those interviewed, less than half felt positive about themselves in any realistic manner. These individuals could talk about failure, not as a personal defeat, but rather as a challenge, especially if they "had given it a good try." Several said they knew their level of ability and felt good about succeeding in the long run. There was a feeling that good things that they had done in the past acted as a positive reinforcement, stimulating them to keep on trying and not lose confidence in themselves.

Almost an equal number of the interviewees were quite negative about themselves. They felt "bad," "ashamed," "frustrated," "angry" if they did something wrong. Several of the younger adults tried to cover this up with the statement that they were "very proud" of themselves and "could do anything" they really wanted to do. The more negative remarks ranged from "I don't ever do that well," to feelings of self-disgust, deep anger leading to rising blood pressures and shouting, to a more passive, depressive state, "that something is missing inside of me."

Over half of the people attributed the development of a positive self-image to a caring person, usually someone in their immediate family environment --a parent who had encouraged them to keep on trying, who had faith in them, who had tried to set them a positive example, or who had provided them with a loving environment; a spouse who gave them support and encouragement; a teacher

who had challenged them to do something they didn't think they could do. In one case, a daughter provided the support and encouragement, while another experienced therapy and felt that this was a major turning point in life. On the other hand, about 20 percent felt that there was no one person or event in particular that had helped them and that their development could really be attributed to a desire "to show others" (family and peers) that they could succeed.

Only a third of the interviewees felt that positive events had given them a sense of accomplishment, helping them develop a strong self-image. In many cases it was being able to do well at a job, being promoted for good work, getting recognition from others in extracurricular activities, being able to do things without making mistakes, getting good grades in school. A couple of people felt that helping others with their troubles made them feel better about themselves. Some thought they had been burdened with a great deal of responsibility at a very early age; this had taught them self-reliance and given them confidence in their ability to do things.

Events that hindered development of a positive self-image were, to a great extent, attributed to negative relationships with parents who were overly critical or strict, or on the other hand, who did not seem to care. A poor educational background, lack of a diploma, and poor grades were given as reasons by others. One well-spoken young man indicated he had spent his childhood in special education classes and came to believe he could succeed at nothing--not even running.

When specifically asked about educational events, the interviewees responded overwhelmingly (78%) that it had been a teacher who had either encouraged them or who had served as a positive role image for them. Adult educators were described as being kind, willing to take a lot of time with people, giving them constant feedback, and showing interest in them as individuals. Several people

seemed overwhelmed by the fact that teachers cared enough to explain things over and over again. Others spoke lovingly of the teacher who had recognized some ability they had and encouraged its development. On the other hand, getting good grades, learning to read or do math, being given responsibility in class activities or learning something applicable to the job were also seen as positive aspects of education. A few felt it was their own accomplishments--such as getting the GED or helping others to learn--that had made them feel good about themselves.

Negative aspects of education were fairly evenly divided into three main areas: low achievement (bad grades, failing to do well on tests, lack of a diploma), a poor teacher (indifferent, one who "put them down," didn't help enough, treated them as children), and conflict with peers in the classroom. Such experiences really seemed to disturb a number of self-concepts.

A Constructive Attitude Towards Life

"In general, are things getting better or worse in this world? Do you have much of a zest (or enthusiasm) for life, or do you pretty much take it as it comes? Do you think a lot about the past or future?" These were the questions used to stimulate discussion about general attitudes toward life. In view of the difficulties and disadvantages faced by many of the participants, their attitudes were surprisingly constructive. Half of the interviewees proclaimed this to be a pretty good world we live in; nevertheless, other remarks indicated a less optimistic picture. Almost 70 percent of the interviewees were rather negative, stating that things are getting worse. (The present state of the economy seemed a big concern.) They did not seem to think they had much zest for life, but rather that they had to take life as it came along. As for living in the present, about 40 percent of those who responded to this question indicated success at being able to do so, while 60 percent admitted that worries about the past or future dominated their lives.

Almost half of those who felt positive about life thought that this was the result of a positive family environment or caring friends, relatives or teachers. Caring, stable, pleasant relationships, and doing fun things with others had helped them view this world as a safe and pleasant place. Another 20 percent felt that certain positive learning experiences (reading, traveling, learning English, therapy of some sort) had had a great impact on their attitude towards life. About 15 percent felt it was the result of their religious faith or a caring religious advisor who had helped them in difficult moments. On the other hand, there were a few who felt that their outlook on life was mainly a result of their own actions, that no one else was in control of them (one lost weight and changed her outlook on things; another was able to look back and understand about life as an adult). Life taught some to mature and change their outlook on things.

Among those who pointed out events that left a negative taste toward life, almost half contended they had not had any "caring" relationships or that people had been too critical. Separation brought about by death or marital problems left some feeling very lonely and worried about responsibilities. Others cited a negative environment with few opportunities and too many problems. When questioned about different aspects of their educational experience that might have affected their attitudes toward life, more than three fourths mentioned good teachers and counselors who had made them enthusiastic about things, who had treated them as individuals and gauged the pace of learning to meet their needs. Many of these compliments paid to teachers applied to various levels and were general in nature. However, enough specified the enthusiasm of the teacher so that should be noted. Moreover, adult educators were frequently singled out by interviewees for having treated them with respect and helped them make realistic assessments about their needs and abilities. This support made the students feel that they could do things on their own, thereby losing their fear of change. A number also pointed to Adult Basic Education classes as "a positive experience," "an inspiration to go on," "an eye-opener because it took away fears about learning." It was evident from these adult

learners that when one feels good about oneself and thinks that something positive and practical has been learned, one feels good about things in general.

On the other hand, ten interviewees pointed to school events that had led to a negative outlook. Teachers who were unenthusiastic, who were late, or who felt students were too stupid to waste time on made a number of students bitter. It is interesting to note that only one of these ten complaints referred to an adult education situation.

Self-Direction

To initiate discussion on self-direction, the interviewees were asked whether they frequently sought advice from others and whether they worried about criticism when they did things differently. Their remarks indicated a great deal of self-direction in some, while others were obviously quite dependent.

About 20 percent of the students decribed themselves in terms that indicated considerable dependency. They admitted that they always checked with someone before doing things and that they worried if they did things differently. Some even admitted they preferred being told exactly what to do. On the other hand, several individuals recognized their dependence but indicated they were trying to move to a more independent state even though such a process frightened them. However, nearly one half of the interviewees indicated a considerable sense of self-direction. They said they would "inquire of knowledgeable others" especially in important decisions; they would weigh the pros and cons, and then act independently. They might worry occasionally about what others would say but nevertheless, would proceed -- unless their actions resulted in harm to someone else. A few showed an immature or almost reckless self-direction; they never asked others' advice and didn't worry about anyone's criticism.

When relecting upon the development of self-direction, the interviewees frequently related it to the manner in which they had grown up. In many cases, they were not given a great deal of help; they had to learn to do things on

their own. Self-direction was a simple matter of survival. A few did mention strong role models, especially parents or husband, that influenced their own independence. Others thought it was the encouragement and support of a parent, a spouse, a friend that made the difference. These same trend factors were credited with development of self-direction in out-of-the-home situations. Mentioned were challenges such as immigration to the United States and presidency of the PTA or supporting relationships from people such as counselors, clergymen and educators. It is interesting to note that hardly anyone mentioned any special talent or ability as leading to self-direction.

When asked about events that hindered the development of self-direction, the few who responded pointed mainly to distrusting or dominating parents. Two of them indicated guilt feelings kept them from trying things.

When queried about the educational events that contributed to their sense of self-direction, it was the teacher "who encouraged self-direction" that was the factor most frequently credited. How did they do this? One said: "My teachers seldom taught us as a group; instead, they gave us assignments and we had to go and do them. This helped create self-direction." Others echoed this theme: their teachers promoted independence by being "flexible," "open-minded," "available and concerned," but in the final analysis they made it clear,"It's up to you to learn." One of the adult students said that her teacher helped plan a strategy for asking for a raise. When it proved successful, the student's spirit of self-direction was given a great boost. Others remembered the teacher who "pushed them to learn new things," who encouraged them to "be a go-getter," or to "set their own course." Only two people pointed to educational factors other than the teacher that had supported the development of independence. One mentioned school discipline and the other, peer relationships. A number did say the school did "nothing" to develop any sense of self-direction,and one supported this with an example of a teacher's mistake

as being the only thing she could remember from school as promoting her sense of self-direction. A half dozen of the interviewed pointed to directive teachers as examples of what should not be done if self-direction is a goal of education. Perhaps this whole area is best summarized by the insight of a young man, "It's what the teachers didn't do that made me self-directed."

Ability to Relate to People

Although those interviewed related well to the interviewers, an analysis of their remarks indicates that at least one third of them have had serious difficulties in developing significant relationships with others. Ten percent of the total admitted that they were uncomfortable, shy, "loners with few friends," or that they had difficulties handling discussions with those who disagreed with them. Perhaps the most telling of these remarks was that of the young man who stated: "My friends are the people here at the learning center." He had no friends elsewhere. Another twenty percent claimed to have friends; but in describing the relationships, they frequently resorted to words indicative of efforts to manipulate such "friends." They either kept their contact group small so they could "control the situation" or tried to develop many contacts "because you never know when you can use them." There also seemed to be a tendency among these individuals to avoid controversy, rather than to work through it to more meaningful relationships. A special group among those having difficulty developing relationships were the four or five recent immigrants who blamed their frustration on the language.

Approximately half of the interviews seemed to involve people with healthy interpersonal skills -- individuals with the ability to communicate without attempting to force their beliefs on others and to make their relationships growing, deepening encounters. They tended to like many people but to be close only to a few. In general, they showed respect for people and a desire to learn from others. One middle-aged male kept emphasizing his

belief that his good relationships to others were due to the fact that his father had taught him to be a good listener.

What promoted the ability to relate well to others? The most frequent response was: "That's the way our family was." Others picked out specific role models, most frequently their father, but occasionally some friend or associate. Certain situations, such as a job in sales, a PTA office, military service, church or volunteer work, were credited with promoting contact and, consequently, ability to deal with others more adeptly. Several negative situations, such as a divorce, a break-up with a friend, or therapy, were turned to a positive value in some people's opinions. As one woman said, she learned to use the psychologist's methods of questioning and explaining in her own conversations with people. Somewhat in this same vein, two recalled maturing to the point where "something inside clicked" -- they realized the importance of friends.

The major theme of those who pointed to something specific that interfered with their development of interpersonal relations was stated dramatically by a 54-year-old woman who had never gone to school. "When I got to be with other kids, I didn't know what they were talking about because I had never gone to school." This emptiness or gap in their lives was referred to by several others, but in situations such as: "I left home at 13 to live with relatives"; "I moved from my native land"; "I was an only child"; "I was isolated as a special education student in school." Only three or four placed the blame for their poor relationships on others, noting "you can't really trust people."

"You can learn anything much better if you can feel at ease," was the way one woman expressed her notion of the relationship of education to the ability to relate to others. A number of others supported this by indicating how school had helped them gain confidence or "drew me out of my private shell,"

or just generally credited the friendly atmosphere of working with others at school for developing skill in interpersonal relations. A few were more specific and tried to explain how certain school situations or teachers had helped them to understand people. For example, working in small groups with other adults led one woman to an insight she describes as "learning people can be under pressure one day and outgoing the next."

The "friendliness" of the teacher, however, was the one factor so often repeated that it dominated the discussions on developing the ability to relate to others. Although no single student was able to formulate the thought explicitly, a number of them seemed to be saying that until the teacher accepted them as individuals, they had difficulty accepting and relating to one another. How did the teacher do this? In the words of the interviewees, the teacher "talks and finds out what you want," "listens," "understands," "treats you like a person, not a kid," "introduces new people so you can help one another," or "helps when and as often as needed." Apparently, some appreciated an even more direct approach, for several remembered a teacher telling them that they were "as good as anyone, so just be yourself." A young man who had tremendous difficulties relating to others -- so much that he confessed to having asked the authorities to allow him to remain in the institution where he had developed a few relationships -- offered this insight on teacher behavior and student development. "A good teacher will not just know names, but will know people well enough to group those who will get along together. Then the students will learn from one another."

Working With Others

Although the majority of those interviewed could not be considered as difficult to work with, few gave indication of any ability to develop meaningful interpersonal relations with co-workers. Fifty to sixty percent of those interviewed on this trait appeared not difficult to work with but also not

likely to develop close relationships. Twenty to twenty-five percent appeared to be having problems on the job. It was not so much a matter of having to follow orders; but rather that one should do one's job and avoid contact with others. To some extent, this was due to fear of conflict or of being taken advantage of by someone else. A large percentage just tried to ignore or avoid those who were difficult to get along with, whereas some of the more aggressive indicated they would express their negative reactions verbally. There were several immature-sounding people who were on the defensive -- ready to complain to someone, fight, walk out, or quit the job. Only a few people indicated actual skill at personal relations. One person, for example, appeared to be a born counselor; several were willing to "bend over backwards" to let another work through his problem, while a few others were quite outgoing in efforts to develop positive relationships with others.

As to which events helped people learn how to work better with others, forty percent of those interviewed simply stated that working with others and having to learn how to give or take orders helped them. They had to learn to get along with others in order to be successful on the job. About one of every four people noted that it had been their parents who had helped them to get along with others by training them and by serving as positive examples. One woman felt it was her husband who had helped her learn to be more outgoing and to get along better with others. On the other hand, almost one fourth of the interviewees could only suggest that it was their own personality or sociable nature that was responsible for their good relationships with others. Being tactful and tolerant of others was considered important by this group.

Working in groups was considered by more than half the group to be the most significant educational activity that had helped them learn to work with others. In some cases they also mentioned that the teacher was a good role model (treating all students alike). Getting all the students to participate

in discussions and being taught to understand others as well as oneself also helped a great deal. Some people had received very practical training courses and developed skills in human relations.

Adult education promotes a comfortable environment in which one can learn at one's own pace and interact well with others -- all factors that facilitate learning from others and result in better working relations with others. However, not all had learned this lesson, for a few showed their animosity by complaints of peers or of teachers who rambled -- there was too much emphasis on theoretical things when "horse sense" was needed.

Problem Solving

Only one third of those interviewed seemed to have a clear concept of what was involved in problem solving or to have rather positive feelings about their decision-making ability. They tended to think things through carefully so they didn't have to be changing their minds about things. Some saw the value of compromise, of perseverance, of adjusting in process. Others described how they took time to study all the pros and cons before making a decision -- one they could stick with once it was made. But in general, the interviewees were very indecisive or made hasty decisions without any bases for doing so, just to keep things from hanging in the air. They certainly showed no sense of living with ambiguity. Others admitted changing their minds frequently if things didn't work well or after consulting someone else. Some were completely dependent upon a spouse to make decisions for them; one was so unsure of herself, she did not even want to talk about problem solving.

Over forty percent of those who spoke of experiences that helped them with problem solving said it was due to someone in the family or to having been given many responsibilities as a child. Approximately one third said they had to learn how to solve problems as they went along in life and had gained experience along the way; some in school, some while working. Those who saw

themselves as self-directed felt challenged by problems, liked to be organized, took pride in good problem solving, or wanted to help others (children) with their problems. It was quite evident that most of those interviewed equate problem solving ability with confidence in themselves rather than any type of decision-making skills. Similarly, those who admitted depending on others for problem solving contended that they had been trained that way by parents and the school -- no one had helped them develop confidence in themselves.

With regard to perceptions of educational events that developed problem-solving skills, the vast majority of the interviewees cited a teacher as being the most important influence. Encouragement, praise, being given responsibility, making a student feel important were all considered important. But only three or four pointed to actual instruction such as training in decision making, getting help in pointing out alternatives, learning to look at the whole situation where decisions had to be made. Only one person spoke of a teacher who offered suggestions but insisted that decisions, "ownership of the problem," belonged to the students. One other was grateful for the logic taught in an Assertiveness Training Session. Again, those who mentioned school experiences that interfered with decision-making all spoke in terms of things that destroyed confidence in self. It was the discipline, the books, the insistence on "ask before you do," and "follow assignments" that prevented the development of decision-making abilities.

Attitude Towards Learning

Very few of the adults interviewed felt negative about learning. About one out of four were somewhat ambivalent since learning can be a little "scary," especially when it might call for change. All in all, about 75 percent were excited, enthusiastic (one, an "eager beaver;" another, a "bookworm"), liked the idea of change if it was something helpful and if they learned a better way to do something. The new, the different was definitely attractive; the idea of change could be threatening.

Some felt their positive attitude towards learning was the result of a supportive parent or spouse; others pointed to something in school that stimulated them to keep on learning on their own. Adult education courses were a big help in problem-solving. A considerable number of interviewees mentioned some positive event in their life that had given them a feeling of accomplishment and a love for learning (e.g., travel and learning about others, success in business, becoming a good conversationalist, learning English, therapy). The few self-reliant people felt that it was their innate curiosity, need to become responsible at an early age, need to communicate in another language, or a deep desire to help others that had led them to develop a positive outlook. A number of women wanted to help their children learn better or felt the need to keep up with them.

Not being able to go to school, a lack of reading or language skills, and parents who thought learning was "too much trouble" were given as reasons for making some of the interviewees feel negative about the learning situation. Others felt insecure about change, mistrustful of others, or unaware of the consequences of ignorance when young.

The teacher definitely plays a very important role in helping students feel positive about learning. Forty percent felt that teachers who were enthusiastic and who made the subject interesting, who challenged them, who really cared whether they learned or not made them like school and lose their fear of facing something new. Many remembered teachers who had served as positive role models. Adult education classes were specifically mentioned as being very good at meeting individual students' needs and promoting good fellowship among students of different backgrounds. Learning new things at the center gave adults something to pass on to their children and increase their desire to learn as well.

Being successful as a student naturally makes people feel more positive about learning; those who felt negative about learning had not had very good experiences in school. They felt teachers were interested only in those with brains or in those who were rich and did not try to reach the others or to challenge them. A couple felt learning about new things was a necessary evil -- you have to do it to survive in society.

Competing for Jobs

Many of those interviewed felt they were at a disadvantage in competing for jobs. For one out of four, this disadvantage was debilitating. Typical reactions of these individuals were: "I get nervous" when thinking about an interview or "They (the interviewers) want more than I am capable of." Some openly admitted that they were poor at finding job openings, at doing "paper work," or at understanding the "big words" used by employers. Others would not even accept responsibility for their difficulties, either blaming age, local unemployment or the "immigration people," or intimating that the counselors would find a job for them. Another forty to fifty percent of those interviewed were rather ambiguous about their employability. Some had never had to compete for a job; others realized they were deficient in certain job-seeking skills but trusted that they could find employment if pressed.

Although there was some concordance that a lack of education or basic academic skills did interfere with job hunting, few people volunteered any insight into what increased their ability to compete for jobs. A half dozen spoke of the ability to relate to others as being a significant advantage for one seeking employment, but most were quite reticent on this issue. When prompted to think of school events as a help or hindrance in job hunting, several did remember specific training in competencies such as filling out application forms or job interviewing; more, however, talked of teacher encouragement or similar confidence-building factors. Whether this was due

to the fact that they had experienced no employment training in their academic programs or whether they had such training but found it of little value is difficult to say. A small number, however, did request that specific training in competing for jobs be included in the ABE curriculum.

Consumer Skills

The adults interviewed were much more positive about their consumer skills than about their ability to compete for good jobs. Two thirds of those who responded in this regard thought they were pretty good shoppers. They compared prices and brands--some even nutritional value--and they used and stuck to shopping lists. Few, however, used credit of any kind.

The interviewees were also quite definite about where they had learned these shopping skills. They were learned in the school of hard knocks. Most everyone had some experience to relate that typified their contention of having learned consumerism as a result of struggle for survival. Perhaps the most humerous of these was related by a young man who reminisced about living with his grandmother and her $250 welfare check. "She knew every brand there was, and the exact price of everything. When she sent me to the store, I really had to be sharp in order to save a nickle for a candy bar for myself."

Was there anything about school that helped? One third of those interviewed felt there was nothing. The positive responses were almost equally divided between general experiences of elementary or secondary school (such as home economics classes) and specific instruction in certain coping skills presented within the adult education program. Once again, the idea of self-survival emerged as several spoke of self-directed learning activities which built their consumer skills.

Meeting One's Own Goals

On this point there was near unanimity among those interviewed: they had met their own personal goals in their adult education programs. Some

spoke of the fears they had when entering the program -- considering themselves too old to learn, were wary of books, or had unpleasant memories of childhood school days. Others had become aware of new educational goals they now wanted to attack. All but four or five were very enthusiastic about their adult learning experiences.

At this point the interview took a somewhat different trend. Rather than pursue life or school experiences that led to satisfaction in the area of meeting one's goals, the adult learners were asked to specify things that they particularly liked about the program and things that they thought would improve the program. (The complete listings of these suggestions are included in Figures 1 and 2 on the following pages.) Once again the adults reaffirmed their perception of the teacher as the heart and soul of the educational encounter. More than a third of the statements credited the teacher with being the factor that made the program worthwhile; moreover, good, useful content received its share of the credit, as did social factors such as peer relations, comfortable atmosphere, and flexibility of programs. It was interesting to note that several people evaluated the program in almost the same words: "It's free and it's good!"

Most of the suggestions for improvement can be summarized in one word--"more." The interviewees wanted more teachers, more materials, more time, more opportunities. They also requested more services such as transportation and child care and more opportunity to interact with other people; but basically they seemed to say that they just wanted to be able to benefit more from a program that they saw as good and of practical use.

FIGURE 1

WHAT DID YOU LIKE ABOUT THE PROGRAM?

1. It satisfied my need for certification.(2)
2. I always wanted to complete high school.
3. "It's free and it's good!" (3)
4. "Coming to the classroom"
5. Teachers and resources.
6. Flexibility: We could do work at home at our own pace, at convenient hours.(4)
7. Expertise and attitude of teachers.(2)
8. Teachers: The way they talk and understand; their support and encouragement. (7)
9. Teacher helped a lot.
10. Comfortable atmosphere.(2)
11. The spirit of other students and teachers: "Were in it all together" (2)
12. Job training plus pay while attending.
13. TV learning: Helped things stick.
14. "If it weren't for this program I couldn't go to school. We definitely need the program."
15. Manpower - helps a lot to find good job position.
16. English: content and "great teacher"
17. Science: made me interested in gardening.
18. Information about health.
19. Information I can use everyday.
20. "They told it like it was."
21. Counselors: who "pick up" on your needs.
22. Teachers who learn from students; thus giving student confidence in self.
23. Teacher who brought math to life.
24. Opportunities to interact with other students.
25. English conversation groups
26. Teachers help immediately and as often as needed.
27. Assertiveness training; drew out peoples' problems so they didn't feel alone.
28. Having fewer students: Teacher worked individually with students.
29. The subject matter orientation
30. Program helps people better themselves; keeps them involved and healthy.
31. Teacher: "so enthusiastic, the attitude was contagious."
32. Teacher: ability to approach peoples' defect without putting them down.
33. Use of peer tutoring.
34. I like to learn.

FIGURE 2

SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT

1. Child care at Learning Center or class site. (2)
2. Night-time transportation
3. Night teachers don't treat us like adults.
4. I needed more math.
5. More teachers (3)
6. Get more involved with student (18 year old who wants counseling).
7. More visual aids for those who learn best that way.
8. I need more time than I'm getting.
9. Get more teachers that understand a person and make them want to learn. (2)
10. Have beginning, intermediate and advanced levels in the program (for ESL).
11. Expand opportunities; offer more things (ex. typing).
12. Pacing needs to keep atuned to the needs of the adult.
13. Keep Learning Center open for the summer.
14. Some students disturb others with their talking. The instructors should stop them.
15. Started me at too high a level in the program (needed writing, spelling and some other things first - not ESL).
16. I need more time with GED test preparation.
17. Teachers showed some favoritism and sometimes neglected those who needed help.
18. Teachers rush sometimes without explaining thoroughly.
19. Teachers belittle some students if they don't understand.
20. More practice materials.
21. More books; more resources. (3)
22. Pay teachers more.
23. Greater chance for me to interact with more people. (2)

Teacher Traits and Learner Success

As was mentioned earlier, a list of ten competencies needed to be an effective teacher of adults had been developed for use during the interviews. This list, based on prior research into teacher competency areas, was printed on a small card (Appendix A) and presented to the interviewee at the conclusion of discussions on each growth factor. Each interviewee could pick as many as five of these teacher traits that he or she felt had been particlarly important in the development of that growth factor. (General findings are displayed in Table 1 on the following page.)

In the opinion of the interviewees the teacher trait that was most important for individual growth and development was the ability of the teacher to relate to the student. This competency was not only mentioned much more frequently than any other characteristic but also was percieved as the most important contribution to seven of the ten specific growth factors. The importance of the teacher's ability to relate to the adult learners, of course, had been supported throughout the interviews. Over and over again reference was made to the teacher as the one educational factor that mattered most in learning and growth.

The ability to assess learner needs also ranked very high. The assessing and consequent dealing with the learning needs of each individual seemed particularly important to many of the adults. During the interview process it became apparent that many equated having the learning activities directed to their needs with being treated like adults. "Children are told what to study; adults are helped to learn what they need to learn" appeared to be a truism to many of the interviewed. Growth areas that were perceived as most enhanced by learner need assessment were: relating to and working with others, the skill areas of job seeking and consumerism, and the positive attitude toward learning and meeting of one's own goals in education.

Table 1. Teachers' behaviors that helped develop learner success traits studied.[1]

| ATTRIBUTES | Constructive Attitude | Self-Image | Self-Direction | Relating to Others | Working with Others | Attitude Towards Learning | Problem-Solving | Competing for Jobs | Consumer Skills | Meeting Personal Goals | Totals |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Good Teacher/Student Relationships | 29 | 26 | 16 | 23 | 14 | 17 | 22 | 4 | 0 | 18 | 169 |
| Understanding the Adult Learner | 18 | 17 | 8 | 3 | 5 | 15 | 4 | 4 | 2 | 15 | 91 |
| Use of Community Resources | 4 | 3 | 2 | 9 | 1 | 0 | 0 | 3 | 3 | 6 | 31 |
| Assessment of Learner Needs | 19 | 15 | 11 | 17 | 15 | 13 | 18 | 4 | 2 | 16 | 130 |
| Well-Planned Learning Activities | 13 | 5 | 9 | 5 | 3 | 10 | 4 | 3 | 3 | 14 | 69 |
| Management of Learning Activities | 10 | 5 | 7 | 3 | 5 | 7 | 4 | 1 | 0 | 3 | 45 |
| Evaluation of Learning | 19 | 17 | 11 | 12 | 11 | 14 | 12 | 4 | 1 | 11 | 112 |
| Development as a Professional | 10 | 7 | 5 | 2 | 5 | 3 | 2 | 0 | 0 | 4 | 38 |
| Concern for Non-Instructional Aspects | 14 | 8 | 7 | 7 | 5 | 16 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 9 | 74 |
| Presentation of Content | 13 | 6 | 11 | 2 | 4 | 13 | 3 | 5 | 3 | 12 | 72 |
| n = | 149 | 109 | 87 | 83 | 68 | 108 | 75 | 29 | 15 | 108 | 831 |

[1] Interviewees were allowed to select up to five of the ten teacher traits, with the exception of the last attribute, when up to eight could be identified.

Evaluation of learning--"knowing how well we were doing and telling us"--was given the third highest overall rating by the adult students. This seemed to appeal to the adult's sense of independence and responsibility in the learning transaction. It was given particular recognition by the interviewees in the area of growth in self-direction, self-concept, working with others and attitude toward learning.

The importance of competency in the areas of understanding the adult learner, concern for noninstructional aspects, good presentation of content, and the adequate planning of learning activities also received solid support from the adults interviewed. Understanding the adult learner well enough to make learning easier, yet more challenging, was seen as relating strongly to development of the self-image and positive attitudes toward learning. Concern for noninstructional aspects such as good materials and classroom comfort was significantly appreciated as improving attitudes toward learning. On the other hand, neither the ability to make use of community resources nor teacher development as a professional received much support from the adult learners. Also rated low was the competency area dealing with management of learning activities. However, in attempting to state this concept in terminology to which the students could easily relate, there may have been an unfortunate choice of words. "Kept us busy learning a lot" may not have connoted good classroom management to the adults but rather the opposite, for many of them mentioned the flexibility of scheduling and the teachers' permitting them to work at their own pace as very attractive aspects of adult education. Keeping busy may have been interpreted as poor classroom management.

## CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Sixty-five adult learners were interviewed for the purpose of clarifying relationships between personal development or success, and learning activities they had experienced. Learner success was defined in terms of ten traits which ranged from personal growth in self-direction and ability to relate to others through positive attitudes toward learning to competency in competing for jobs and being a wise consumer. All but sixteen of the interviewees were or had been students in an adult basic education program. The interviews averaged one hour in length and were conducted in seven representative communities in Texas. As can easily be imagined, these in-depth interviews resulted in a tremendous amount of data. This report has been based on a preliminary overview of the findings and has not employed any sophisticated manipulation of the data; however, it is believed that the following conclusions and recommendations can be made with confidence.

1. Self-concept. The intense desire of these students for self-improvement and their general concern with personal success and failure were indicative of a serious overall need to enhance their self-concept. The vast majority credited positive relationships to other meaningful individuals as the major cause of past growth in this area. Some, however, did specify accomplishments that promoted self-confidence. Thus, as many occasions of success as feasible should be built into adult education programs; all threats to individuals should be removed if possible. More important, however, is the fact that self-esteem, for the most part, will be increased by the encouragement and positive reinforcement of a teacher who has developed the ability to relate to the individual students and their needs, to give continuing feedback, to answer questions over and over again, to recognize and encourage special talents or interests--this is the heart of the teacher's helping others to strengthen their self-concept.

2. Constructive attitude toward life. In view of the many difficulties and disadvantages faced by the majority of the participants, their attitudes were surprisingly constructive with nearly half proclaiming this to be a pretty good world in which to live. Nevertheless, even in this more optomistic group, a significant number were fearful of the future and not at all sure that they could cope with it. Two keys to growth here seemed to emerge: broadening of interpersonal relationships and trying new and stimulating things. Ideally, educational programs should be equipped to do both these things. But it is essential that teachers show enthusiasm for learning and that they help the adults make positive, but realistic, assessments of their needs and abilities.

3. Self-direction. Although twenty percent of the students evidenced an alarming degree of dependency, most showed a considerable degree of self-direction or at least some movement in that direction. The major reason for this self-direction seemed to be the very difficulty of their lives and the consequent need to exert themselves in order to accomplish things. An important secondary factor also emerged, the influence of role models. It became quite apparent that many parents and teachers had been overly directive and had allowed no room for the development of a sense of responsibility or initiative. To encourage the development of self-direction in adult learners, teachers must be role models, displaying true open-mindedness and allowing a great deal of flexibility in the learning experience. They must be available and concerned, yet make it clear that the responsibility for learning lies squarely on the shoulders of the adult learner.

4. Relating to others. The ability to form close relationships with others seemed to be somewhat hampered by the defensiveness of many of those interviewed. About half the adults either saw no reason for others to want to relate to them or displayed a tendency to think of others in terms of how they could be manipulated for their own benefit. Many also seemed to indicate that they preferred

to avoid controversy as much as possible, rather than work through differences to more meaningful relationships. For growth to occur in their ability to relate to others, many of the interviewees had two distinct needs. First, they need to see themselves as acceptable individuals and second, they must have role models to imitate. To fulfill these needs, teachers must go out of their way to show the adult students that they are acceptable as individuals--in spite of the "holes" in their lives--so that they in turn will be able to accept their fellow students and other associates.

5. Working with others. While only one out of four or five appeared to be having problems on the job, the majority of those questioned on this trait were unlikely to develop any close relationships with their fellow workers. (As incated above, many appeared deficient in interpersonal skills.) Nevertheless, the majority did say that the experience of working in groups in the educational program was helpful in learning to work with others on the job. In fact, there were so many references to the need for interaction with others throughout the interviews, that teachers should be encouraged to take advantage of the opportunities for group activites and should consider the possibility of dealing explicitly with the problem of developing positive relationships with fellow workers and other associates.

6. Problem-solving. Only one third of those interviewed gave any indication of the possession of problem-solving or decision-making skills. This may have been due to the design of this segment of the interview, or it may have been that this group of adults was truly weak in these skills. They did speak almost exclusively of emotional support rather than any process skills when discussing decision making. While it is important that this matter be looked at more closely, it can be recommended here that programs for adults dedicate time to the development of rational approaches to problem solving and an awareness of the impact of feelings and emotions upon decision making.

7. Attitude toward learning. Most of the adults showed a very positive attitude toward learning and change. Here again, teacher competencies such as taking time to find out what the individual wanted and needed; keeping check on how well the adults were doing and telling them; and challenging the learners to try new and interesting things were very helpful in developing such positive attitudes. It was also most evident that the teacher must be enthusiastic about learning and change if the student is to "catch" this positive attitude.

8. Competing for jobs. There seemed to be substantial uncertainty among the students concerning their ability to compete successfully for jobs. While success in the adult education program made tremendous differences in their confidence levels, many seemed to be asking for more. It is recommended that the teaching of specific job-seeking skills be included in the adult education curriculum whenever the interests and needs of the learners seem to warrant it.

9. Consumer skills. Most of the interviewees contended that they had had considerable practice in sharpening their consumer skills. Classroom work in this area might not be as important as some educators have proposed although students did indicate an appreciation for classroom practice on day-to-day tasks being incorporated into their learning activities. Also, the fact that none of those queried on the point seemed to make use of any type of credit may be an indication that the groups' consumer skills related only to comparative shopping and not to other aspects of consumerism.

10. Meeting one's own goals. There is no doubt that the adult basic education program was very successful in helping these men and women reach their own goals. Their suggestions for improvement of the program could be summed up in one word: "more." They begged for more teachers, more materials, more services, and more time. Much of the credit for this success must be attributed to the excellence of the program's full-time teachers.

11. Teacher traits. The teacher traits recognized by the adult learners as most important in the promotion of their personal growth were (a) the building of rapport with the learners, (b) the assessment of needs and interests, (c) the evaluation of learning, and (d) sufficent understanding of the adult learner to make learning easier, yet more challenging. These teacher competencies should be given special attention in staff development activities, as well as in the development of selection criteria to be used in employing new teachers.

This method of conducting student follow-ups regarding the success of the program in stimulating personal growth and in meeting the goals of teachers and administrators involved in adult education is to be encouraged. A tremendous amount of useful information was generated. Reports can be customized for local program directors in each of the areas in which interviews were conducted. It is also possible to examine many of the factors involved to discover relationships that might not have been evident in this first analysis. A growing data base can be built which will allow comparisons among many different groups of adult learners. This methodology seems to hold real promise for the development of new insights into the adult teaching/learning transaction.

Is the Adult Basic Education program effective in promoting personal growth and in accomplishing those goals most important to program leaders in the state? For the people interviewed in this study, the answer is definitely "Yes!" The program seems particularly strong in promoting self-direction, a constructive attitude toward life, ability to work with others, a more favorable attitude toward learning, and the meeting of one's own goals. It seems to have great potential in the areas of increasing self-concepts, relating to others, improving problem-solving skills, and in bettering the ability to compete for jobs; however, these are extremely difficult areas for development and the program does not seem to be exerting its full potential as of yet. Teachers, program

directors, and specialists in the field of adult development and learning need to work together to find and implement methodologies for unleashing this potential. This is also the case with regard to the promotion of consumer skills; moreover, there is an additional need in this area to reevaluate exactly what consumer skills typical adult students possess and what they need.

Finally, it is most fitting to conclude this report on student follow-up interviews with the words of three of the interviewees. "If you want it, you make a way to come," said one individual reminding all involved in adult education that a major role is motivational--building relationships, applying lessons to life, and showing the enthusiasm for learning and growth that says to all: "Try it, you'll like it." Another individual, speaking of a boss who had the "right" attitude and implying that this was also the right attitude for a teacher, said: "You don't work for me; you work with me." Adult educators are not in the business of dispensing wisdom; our role is to support learning, and that means we ourselves must be open to learning from our students as well, if they are to learn from us and from each other. The third quotation definitely speaks for itself and was offered with a confident smile: "I've got somebody at school that cares and somebody at home that cares. I'm going to make it."